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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

April 3, 2000



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NO ONE IS PROTECTING THE PUBLIC.**

Terry J. Allen investigates



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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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Letters

Money Still Talks

I have a moment to write this response to Joel Bleifuss' story on the AOL-Time Warner merger because that incompetent Internet service just booted me again for unknown reasons ("Communication Breakdown," February 21).

The best way to fight back against these merged mega-media monsters is to stop giving them what corporate America wants most—our money. Voting with our dollars is the only power that average people have any more.

Face it, our votes at the polls don't count. But big business does care about getting our greenbacks. AOL-Time-Warner-EMI-Turner-and-whatever-else-has-been-swallowed-by-this-sprawling-monolith hasn't found a way to make us pay them. At least not yet. So to paraphrase Ronald Reagan: "Vote with your wallets."

I'm paying more than \$250 a year to AOL (even more than I send *In These Times*!), but that's going to stop when I switch Internet service providers. If enough people rebel and send their money to smaller outfits, it will kick the oligopolist communication companies in their bottom lines. That will also provide cash—the capitalist fertilizer—to nurture competitors.

I say that's a better remedy than relying on Congress and the Federal Communications Communication. Heck, they've already been bought and paid for by the corporations you expect them to corral.

Rick Buck
Port Charlotte, Florida

Malign Intervention

David Moberg is advocating the same humanitarian interventions that Bill Clinton did in justifying the U.S. bombing of Kosovo and Serbia ("A New Interventionism," February 7). Death, destruction and enhanced ethnic cleansing were the outcome of that noble endeavor.

But I agree with Moberg that "if the United States wants human rights respected around the world, then it must start respecting them at home." The United States can best promote human rights abroad by fulfilling its unique destiny as the city on the hill—a beacon of democracy and the rule of law.

John Davis
Hyde Park, New York

Edward S. Herman is right. David Moberg's February 7 editorial ignores the whole brutal

history of U.S. intervention ("Dialogue: A New Interventionism?" February 21).

I subscribed to *In These Times* for some hard-hitting, progressive/radical, tell-the-truth information, not some liberal, co-opted, ruling-elite, apologist fluff. Your February 21 issue is a noticeable improvement.

David Ross
McKinleyville, California

Picking at Scabs

As a subscriber to *In These Times* and fully aware of its union affiliations—National Writers Union and GCIU—I was shocked to see a photo of Nathaniel Abraham that credited not only a scab photographer but a scab paper as well ("Juvenile Crime, Adult Time," February 7).

In July 1995, six unions went out on strike against the Detroit News Association. After more than four years, there are still no contracts. Although many "union" people have been called back to work in the scab plant, it is still considered a scab paper.

The next time you need a photo from Detroit, contact Writer's Guild Local 22 and use a union photo. If you can't find one, then forget about sending me any publication that has to use scab help.

Ellen J. Chase
Detroit

[Expletive] for Brains

I don't understand why Thurston Domina is so surprised and disturbed by the discovery that Allen Lee Sessoms is a potty-mouth with nothing but contempt for his students ("[Expletive] Happens," January 10). Sessoms is after all an [expletive]-head college president in a city with an [expletive]-head mayor in a state with an [expletive]-head governor. None of these [expletive]-for-brains conservatives want to see poor people disadvantaged by an inferior secondary education get a chance at a higher education.

Marvin A. Gluck
Topanga, California

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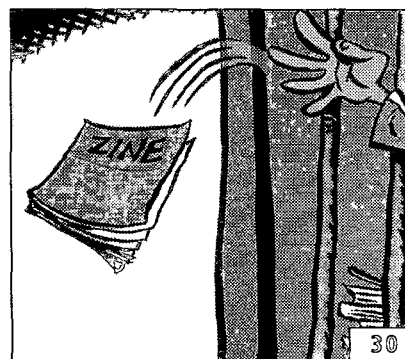
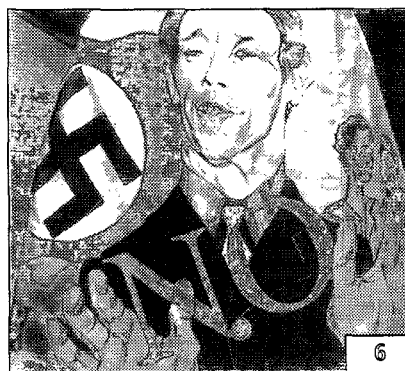
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Cover photo: John Zich/Newsweek

Cancer Calling

Cellular phones are convenient—but at what price?

When talking on your cell phone, the short antenna next to your head emits microwave radiation that passes through your skull and as much as an inch into your brain, exposing your cerebellum to a dose of radiation that is close to the same wavelength (frequency) produced by your microwave to cook bacon, only at an intensity about 1,000 times lower.

This should concern the world's 300 million cell phone users, 83 million of whom live in the United States. Recent animal experiments and epidemiological studies indicate that the microwave radiation emitted by cell phones may damage brain cell DNA and increase the risk of cancer. However, like the threats to public health posed by sewage sludge, carcinogenic cosmetics and agricultural pesticides, the federal agencies charged with safeguarding public health seem more attuned to the needs of the industries they regulate.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) realizes that questions about the safety of cell phones remain unanswered. A "Consumer Update on Mobile Phones" on the agency's Web page reads: "It is well known that high levels of radio frequency radiation can produce biological damage through heating effects (this is how your microwave is able to cook food). However, it is not known whether ... lower levels of radiofrequency radiation like that produced by cell phones might cause adverse health effects as well." (A note on semantics: The cellular industry and the FDA eschew use of the word "microwave," preferring the ameliorative term "radiofrequency radiation.")

The FDA acknowledges that experiments have shown that microwave radiation could cause cancer in laboratory animals, but the agency has chosen to ignore them. In the past year, however, thanks to a flurry of media reports, the public has begun to take notice.

Like other public health controversies, this one has become a scientific showdown between industry-sponsored and independent researchers, with the federal government, in this case the FDA, straddling the fence—loath to offend either the telecommunications industry or the powerful politicians whose campaigns the industry helps fund. But when it comes to cell phones, there is a confusing twist.

Last year, the potential dangers of cell phones made a splash when George Carlo, who for six years had coordinated \$25 million of cell phone research funded by the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA), went public with some unpublished research suggesting that cell phones were not as safe as previously thought. In one CTIA-funded study, researchers at Integrated Laboratory Systems in North



By Joel Bleifuss

Carolina found that microwave radiation from mobile phones damaged the chromosomes of blood cells called lymphocytes after 24 hours of exposure. And a CTIA epidemiological study found a link between cell phones and neurocytoma, a rare type of brain cancer. (The average length of phone use in this study was less than three years, which is significant since the technology is relatively new and any long-term effects on humans have yet to show up.)

Some of the most troubling, and thorough, research on the effects of microwave radiation has taken place at the University of Washington. Henry Lai, a bioengineering professor there, found that rats exposed to one hour of low-level microwave radiation suffered from both long-term and short-term memory loss. Because rat brains are very different from human brains, it is difficult to extrapolate from one to the other. But, Lai says, the research "suggests that the microwave radiation caused a change inside the brain, and that the same type of change might also affect humans in a different way."

More troubling to Lai was his research finding that exposure to low-level microwave radiation caused the DNA in rat brain

Until we have research free from industry control, the vindication of the cell phone is a long way off.

cells to break up. Since the DNA of rats and humans is so similar, the radiation emitted by cellular phones is also likely to damage the DNA of human brain cells. Such DNA breakage is serious, Lai says, because "the cell may not be able to repair the breakage correctly and then you are talking about mutation, and mutations can lead to cancer. And in extreme cases, the cell may die from the damage."

However, research funded by the CTIA failed to discover any DNA damage, according to Carlo. "Radiofrequency radiation does not break DNA," he says. "That is a huge finding."

This is strongly disputed by Lai, who in a long letter to *Microwave News*, which for 20 years has been covering the debate over the health effects of nonionizing radiation, slams the CTIA-funded research procedures. "[The CTIA research] program is a disgrace to the American research establishment," Lai wrote. "It has shown a consistent pattern of chaotic corruption and deception. ... Until we have an independent and reliable research program free from any control from the industry, the global impacts of cellular phone use will be assessed by 'post-market surveillance'—in other words, by whatever effects may occur among users of these devices."

Lai, who does not use cell phones, told *In These Times*, "The vindication of the cell phone is still a long way off."

Carlo's critics in the scientific community question his motives. They note that his research agenda has always been skewed toward finding results that will please industry and that he went public with his troubling—and unpublished—data only after his funding from the CTIA ran out, raising the question of whether his recent hue and cry was a ploy to drum up more business. "I have dealt with [the CTIA research program] all the years it was in existence and it was not what I would call a straightforward research program in any way, shape or form," says Louis Slesin, editor of *Microwave News*.

What's needed, Slesin says, is a well-funded independent research effort with special emphasis on studies in which animals are exposed to low levels of cellular phone radiation over their lifetimes.

In 1997, the FDA asked Carlo to conduct such research, but no studies were done and the FDA did not follow up. "The FDA has not been willing to make a case for doing the research," Slesin says. "Basically it has allowed the industry to police itself and to set the agenda, and that has been a mistake because we have gotten nothing done."

That trend continues. The FDA announced last October its intent to collaborate with the CTIA on future research, following up on two very limited areas of concern raised by the group's previous research. But again, the research will be done by the CTIA, and the FDA will have only a nonsupervisory role.

In the wake of last year's negative publicity, the FDA did send a letter to the National Toxicology Program, a government research agency in North Carolina, asking it to conduct microwave experiments on animals over their lifetimes. The petition is currently being considered. The FDA's request was apparently prompted by an Australian experiment, funded by the national telephone company, which discovered that rats exposed to low levels of microwave radiation like that emitted by cell phones had a rate of blood cancer twice as large as that of the control group.

There are other disturbing indications that microwave radiation from cell phones may not be as benign as previously thought. Researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University discovered that cancer cells proliferate when exposed to

microwave radiation like that emitted by cell phones. And research on humans at Bristol University in England discovered that 20 to 30 minutes of exposure to mobile phone radiation adversely affected the functioning of the visual cortex, the area of the brain that processes sight.

The National Cancer Institute is finishing an epidemiological study of brain cancer and cell phone use that should be released within the year. But since cancer can take years to develop and cell phones have not been widely used for

very long, the impact of cell phones on human health may not be readily apparent for years to come. Nonetheless, a recent Swedish epidemiological study discovered that cell phone users were 2.5 times more likely to have tumors in the brain lobes next to their "phone ears." (Because of the small size of the sample, the results, while suggestive, are not statistically significant.)

The only laboratory research in the United States presently conducted on the effects of microwave radiation is being carried out by cell-phone manufacturer Motorola. In 1998, the company broke ranks with the CTIA and openly criticized its research program. "We have lost five critical years, and money can't buy those years back," said Q. Balzano, director of Motorola's Electromagnetic Research Laboratory in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in an interview with *Microwave News*. Slesin adds that Motorola realizes that if cell

phones are proven to be a health hazard, it will need to have good scientific data to protect itself from future lawsuits.

In the meantime, consumers can protect themselves by, ironically enough, turning to the FDA Web site. The FDA emphasizes that "the scientific data *do not* demonstrate that mobile phones are harmful." On the other hand, there is almost no independent research to show that mobile phones are not harmful, and a load of studies that raise questions. Understanding this, the FDA advises consumers "concerned about avoiding even potential risks" to minimize their exposure to cell phone radiation. For example, you could "consider holding lengthy conversations on conventional phones" and limit cell phone use to short calls. If you use a cell phone a lot in the car, you can get a phone that has the antenna outside the car. Finally, cell phone users can wear a headset with a remote antennae to "a mobile phone carried at the waist."

Whether you want microwave radiation penetrating that area is another question. ■



RINNERT

The China Question

By David Moberg

U.S. relations with China, never straightforward, have grown even pricklier. After bombing the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, the Clinton administration negotiated an agreement for China's entry into the World Trade Organization. Yet even as Clinton lobbies for a permanent normal trading relationship (NTR) with China as part of that deal, the State Department recently reported that China's "poor human rights record [has] deteriorated markedly."

Then China abruptly threatened to invade Taiwan if unification talks don't progress quickly. That undermined already shaky prospects for a permanent NTR and boosted chances the Senate will approve the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, deepening U.S. military commitments, and the Pentagon will sell Taiwan four destroyers equipped with sophisticated missile defense radar.

U.S. big business clearly wants secure access to Chinese markets and cheap labor. Most Republicans want to oblige. But in a recent Hart Research Associates poll, 65 percent of Americans surveyed said they opposed permanent NTR, including 75 percent of Republicans. About 70 percent of Americans agreed that Chinese human rights abuses should preclude greater access to U.S. markets and that cheap Chinese labor threatens American jobs. By contrast, only a fifth of those surveyed agreed with Clinton's argument that expanded trade will create more American jobs and improve human rights in China. Opposition to Clinton, however, consists of an uneasy coalition of right-wing anti-communists along with liberal human rights groups, unions and critics of globalization.

What should progressives try to do? First, oppose both deeper military obligations and the sale of new arms to Taiwan. China's invasion talk is reckless, but it's more likely bravado intended to influence elections in Taiwan than any meaningful threat.

Further U.S. military involvement will only make matters worse.

It's important that the debate over permanent NTR not degenerate into China-bashing and crude anti-communism. The focus should be on the failure of the WTO to protect workers rights and the environment, as well as the ways in which multinational corporations use the rules of the game to take advantage of workers in both China and the United States.

Without time to create strong political and economic institutions, China could plunge into Russian-style chaos.

Although some progressives argue that the United States has no business lecturing China, it is perfectly legitimate to raise the issue of human and workers rights in China: Any country should be able to restrict trade with countries where goods are produced under unacceptable conditions—a view that flies in the face of WTO rules.

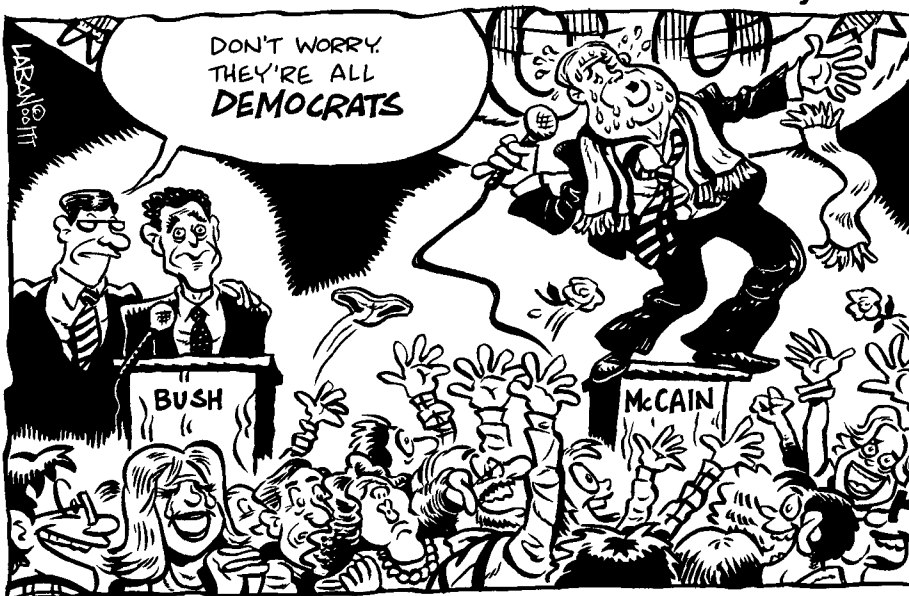
The ballooning U.S. trade deficit—roughly one-fourth of which comes from trade with China—is unsustain-

able and ultimately a threat to the global economy. While some American workers have lost jobs as multinationals take advantage of cheap Chinese labor, the biggest losers have been workers in other Asian countries. Chinese workers and peasants themselves also would lose under China's trade agreement with the United States and WTO membership—with peasants forced off the land and workers exposed to greater instability, while the elite prosper. And without time to create strong political and economic institutions, rapid marketization could plunge China into Russian-style chaos. Thus Chinese authorities, who have a record of ignoring trade agreements, are likely

to renege on their new agreements to protect national industries and prevent social chaos.

It may be unfair to single out China, since many WTO members abuse human and workers rights. But creating obstacles to Chinese entry into the WTO until global economic rules are rewritten is an important tactic to gain political leverage and to continue the challenge to globalization that got a boost last fall in Seattle. That's the goal in this battle, not getting into a war with China, whether military or economic. ■

Terry LaBan



Ralph Really Runs

Nader kicks off his second bid for president

By Doug Ireland

Ralph Nader, whose presidential candidacy has been germinating since last fall, finally dropped the other shoe on February 21. The longtime advocate for consumers, workers and the environment will seek the Green Party nomination, hoping that his campaign will catalyze "a sustained effort to wrest control of our democracy from the corporate government and restore it to the political government under the control of citizens."

The timing of his Washington press conference couldn't have been worse. It came on Presidents' Day, the same day as the Gore/Bradley debate in Harlem and the day before the Michigan primary, where the Bush/McCain contest was absorbing the national media's attention. As a result, Nader got blacked out on the tube, and most of the dailies consigned his announcement to the deep inside pages.

That's too bad, because Nader's lengthy statement of candidacy was one of the most eloquent and sharp-minded dissections of the crisis of American democracy heard from any public figure of stature in years. "The unconstrained behavior of big business is subordinating our democracy to the control of a corporate plutocracy that knows few self-imposed limits to the spread of its power to all sectors of our society," Nader fumed. "Moving on all fronts to advance narrow profit motives at the expense of civic values, large corporate lobbies and their law firms have produced a commanding, multi-faceted and powerful juggernaut. They flood public elections with cash, and they use their media conglomerates to exclude, divert or propagandize."

Would that this salutary tough talk had broken through the corporate media blackout. Naderites, explaining the unfortunate timing of the announcement, point out that election law deadlines in some states meant Nader could not postpone his declaration by even a week. There was also enormous pressure from the Greens, who were champing at the bit to begin activating their troops—and were also looking for assurances that

Nader's campaign this year would be a far cry from his frustrating, token non-campaign of four years ago, when he made only a handful of appearances.

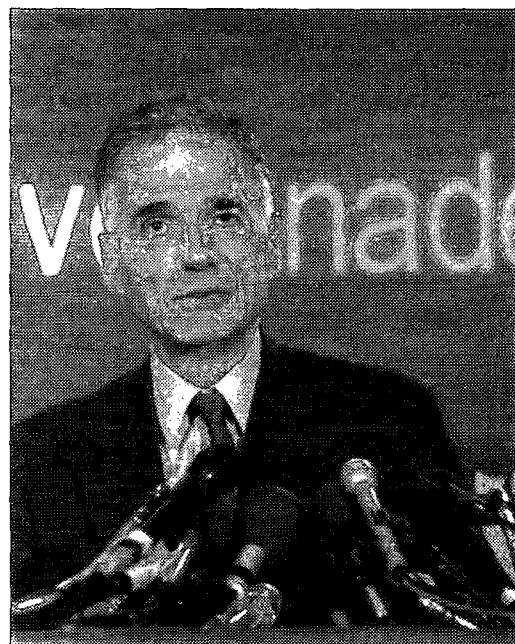
That Nader's race this time will be infinitely more serious than in 1996 is evidenced by his heavy campaign schedule: In the first two weeks in March, Nader plans to make multiple stops in California, New Mexico, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Texas. In 1996, Nader spent only \$5,000, and refused to ask for large contributions. This year, he has signed fundraising letters for an extensive direct-mail appeal and is personally calling \$1,000 donors.

With a fundraising staff headed by Marnie Glickman, who has worked on several Democratic senatorial campaigns, Nader hopes to receive \$2.5 million by August, which—if he can meet an FEC requirement that he collect \$5,000 in each of 20 states—will qualify him for primary federal matching funds, bringing his total war chest to \$5 million. A lot of that money will go toward getting Nader on the ballot; the Green Party is assured of a ballot line in only 12 states. Once the ballot-access drive is completed, the Greens will formally kick off their campaign with their first national nominating convention, to be held at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver on June 24 and 25.

With the exception of Steve Cobble, the campaign's senior strategist—who served as field director in Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns—most of Nader's team has limited campaign experience, drawn either from the skein of public interest organizations Nader has founded in the last three decades or from Green Party cadres. California will provide Nader with his largest ready-made organization: The party has 100,000 registered voters in the Big Enchilada, and has elected some 30-odd Greens to public office. But, with the notable exception of New Mexico, in most of the other states the Nader campaign will have to be built nearly from scratch. Still, the Naderites hope to attract large numbers of new activists who have hitherto abstained from electoral politics—and they point to the 2,000 e-mails they received from volunteers in the first 24 hours

after Nader's announcement, despite the media blackout.

Nader's goal is to get the 5 percent of the national vote necessary to qualify the Greens for FEC matching funds based on the campaign's total fundraising by November, thus making the fledgling party a permanent part of the national political discourse. The party has embraced Nader's economic agenda, and is emphasizing what it calls a "blue-green" alliance of workers and environmentalists that seeks to expand on the successful



CHRIS KLEPONIS/APF

This time, Nader is fundraising aggressively.

coalition-building around the anti-WTO protests in Seattle.

Given Nader's still-enormous name recognition—especially on college campuses, where he is much in demand as a speaker—his reaching the 5-percent goal is not out of the question. A Gore/Bush matchup in November would provide the great opportunity to attract disillusioned voters to Nader, especially given the two candidates' similarity on pro-corporate trade policy. Nader has a resounding message to deliver, one that's unique in this presidential year. And as Eugene Victor Debs used to say, "It is better to vote for what you want and not get it than to vote for what you don't want and get it." ■

For more information, call (202) 296-1600, see www.votenader.com, or write to Nader 2000, P.O. Box 18002, Washington, D.C., 20036.

Fowl Play

New Mexico's new wildlife commissioner has a dirty past

By Jeffrey St. Clair

The newest member of the New Mexico Fish and Game Commission, the panel that sets fish and wildlife policy across the state's 77 million acres, is an oil man named Ray Westall. Westall holds a robust pollution record, including a recent fine for allowing federally protected songbirds to die in toxic oil waste pits on his property.

Dead birds seem to be Westall's forté. It turns out that he is also an outspoken advocate of the bloody spectacle of cock-fighting, a pastime he compares favorably to the euthanasia of cats and dogs at animal shelters. "Westall exhibits a callous disregard for our environment and our wildlife," says Lisa Jennings, director of Animal Protection of New Mexico. "We shouldn't have a commissioner who violates wildlife and environmental laws. We need somebody who is going to defend wildlife."

Westall was nominated for the position by New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson, a Republican and virulent critic of federal environmental laws. Johnson—a close ally of both George W. Bush and John McCain—has been mentioned as a possible high-level appointee if either Republican wins the presidential election, perhaps as head of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Although Westall is a Democrat, he has been a faithful contributor to Johnson's political campaigns and shares the governor's view that states should hold near total control over the management of wildlife and public lands. "The Johnson administration is pushing a states' rights agenda," says Patricia Wolff, director of Santa Fe-based New West Research, a group that tracks the anti-environmental movement. "They have a particular animus toward the Endangered Species Act and other laws that somehow interfere with cattle grazing, logging or oil and gas development."

"Johnson hasn't appointed one environmentalist to the New Mexico Fish and Game Commission," Jennings adds. "It has become a haven for

hunters, ranchers, developers and oil men."

After a contentious debate, the New Mexico state Senate narrowly confirmed Westall's nomination on February 8—largely due to the support of Tim Jennings, the floor leader of the Democrats, who arm-twisted a few colleagues when the vote looked like it might fail. Tim Jennings, it turns out, is far from a disinterested bystander. The majority leader is Westall's business associate and sits on the board of one of his oil companies.

Westall—who owns three oil and gas companies—has been hit with several notices from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the BLM, on grounds that his companies' waste ponds are hazardous to birds and other wildlife. In New Mexico, the waste from oil and natural gas wells—a toxic brine of benzene, toluene and other chemicals—is often left to settle in ponds or pits. Because eastern New Mexico is largely desert, these toxic ponds often attract migratory birds, who mistake them for waterholes. Fish and Wildlife has required oil and gas companies to fence off these sites and cover the ponds with nets.

In January 1999, Fish and Wildlife agents discovered 49 dead songbirds in a waste pit owned and operated by Westall Oil and Gas, and fined the company \$5,000. When asked about the incident during his confirmation hearings, Westall said he had been the victim of an elaborate set-up. He claimed that a disgruntled employee had shot the birds with a BB gun and planted them in the oil pits. Fish and Wildlife biologists dispute this scenario. They performed necropsies on each of the birds and found no evidence that they had been shot. Instead, the investigation determined that the birds

had drowned in an oily soup of poisons.

Altogether, Westall's firms have received more than 150 citations from federal authorities for violations of environmental laws, ranging from leaks and spills of toxic oil wastes, unsafe equipment, wildlife hazards, lack of permits and failure to report spills. "Westall has a reputation for running a really dirty operation down there and for stiff-arming regulators," Wolff says. "That's probably why Johnson wants him on the commission."



VINCENZO PINTO/REUTERS

The Art of Protest: Sudanese model Clara Benjamin appeared on a Milan catwalk wearing designer Guglielmo Mariotto's anti-Jörg Haider skirt during a show on February 21. A week later, Haider resigned from his position as head of Austria's far-right Freedom Party, leaving members stunned. But Haider's retreat from media attention could be a strategic move, allowing him to quietly focus on his ultimate goal, Austria's chancellorship.

Shortly before Westall's nomination went to the Senate for confirmation, New Mexico environmentalists also discovered that he's a fan of cockfighting, the gruesome sport of forcing roosters to fight to the death. Westall even admitted that he had recently wagered on a cockfight, which is illegal in New Mexico, and has actively sought to undermine a federal law banning the transport of roosters across state lines. He compares his support of cockfighting to that of euthanasia. "What about our opponents?" Westall told the Senate committee. "The Humane Society kills hundreds of animals a year, too, and they get paid for it."

This absurd argument found its audience. State Sen. Ron Adair rushed to Westall's defense, saying the Senate should ignore the complaints of environmentalists because they

came from "groups with a deeply radical and violent agenda."

In New Mexico, violence is much more likely to be directed at environmentalists or the rare wildlife species they are trying to protect. Last year, the Animal Protection Institute's office in Santa Fe was shot at by someone who left a note saying they opposed the group's efforts to protect wolves. This terrorist act followed the killing of four Mexican wolves, apparently by ranchers. The Mexican wolf, an endangered species once extinct in the state, had recently been reintroduced into New Mexico by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

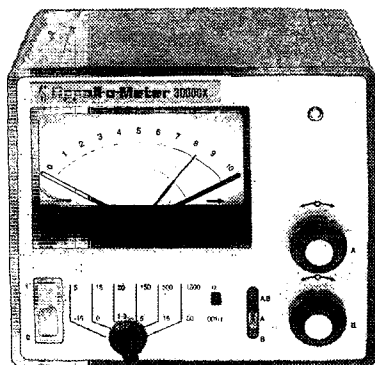
Given his record, it's unlikely that Westall could be counted on to help



PAWEL KOPCZYNSKI/REUTERS

Ray Westall equates cockfighting with euthanasia.

track down the killers. "Westall shows a total lack of understanding of what is needed on a wildlife commission," says state Sen. Cisco McSorley, who voted against Westall's nomination. "Would we accept someone in the adult film industry on the Board of Education?" ■



Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle

Tax Breaks 5.9

As tax season creeps closer, many Americans are racking their brains to come up with inventive business deductions. They can only envy their counterparts in Britain and Germany, who can actually deduct corporate bribes made overseas as legitimate business expenses, notes a recent report from the British Society for Advanced Legal Studies. To be fair, Germany does require taxpayers to specify exactly what benefit the bribes were intended to bring, and to provide proof that the bribes were actually paid—apparently there is little honor among bribers.

McSchools 5.6

Would you like fries with that pop quiz? Pennsylvania Gov. Thomas Ridge wants to hire Standard and Poor's—a firm famous for its corporate analyses—to do a sort of cost-benefit analysis of the state's educational system, The Associated Press reports. But the proposal isn't sit-

ting well with educators. "You can't get an idea of how well education is happening by trying to look at teaching like it's a fast food business," Pennsylvania State Education Association President Patsy Tallarico told the press.

Remain Seated 4.3

Can't get enough of cramped, uncomfortable airline seats? Lufthansa is offering the opportunity to recreate the ambiance of a crowded international flight in your own living room: It's selling off thousands of old seats for the low, low price of \$206 a piece. So far, the *Wall Street Journal* reports, they've sold more than 5,000 of them. One buyer told the *Journal* that he'd bought a row of seats for his son. But even on land, he notes, "nobody sits in the center seat." Airline seats do have one advantage over more traditional comfy chairs, of course: If your house should suddenly plunge into the sea, your seat cushion can be used as a floatation device.

Right of Way 7.3

Norman Green, a British pub owner, was recently hit by a bus in downtown Leicester, England—an accident that left him unable to work for several months. But when he tried to collect damages from the First Leicester Bus Company, Reuters reports, it sent him a bill instead—claiming that he'd done \$845 worth of damage to the bus' lights and windshield. The bus company temporarily has halted its attempts to collect the money—apparently Green has none—but they're still blaming Green for the damages. "This accident happened because Mr. Green was not looking where he was going," a spokesman told reporters.



TERRY LABAN

Squeeze and Vote

Haiti prepares for its first elections in three years.

By Catherine Orenstein

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI—In March, Haitians are expected to go to the polls for their first vote in three years, ever since a parliamentary dispute over elections in April 1997 led to the prime minister's resignation and, ultimately, to the dissolution of the entire legislature in January 1999. Since then, President René García Preval and eight remaining senators have been Haiti's only elected officials. The upcoming vote, currently scheduled for March 19 with a possible run-off in April, will determine nearly every elected post in the nation.

The United States has heavily promoted the elections, designating more than \$12 million for Haiti's electoral process. In addition to paying for training, ballots and other materials, the United States also has channeled \$3.5 million into a consultant group, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), upon whose recommendations Haitians are, for the first time ever, obtaining picture identification cards as part of voter registration.

Over the past decade, Haitian voter participation has been steadily and dramatically sinking—from 85 percent in the 1990 presidential election to less than half that figure in 1995, to a mere 5 percent in Haiti's last parliamentary poll in 1997. This is the unsurprising result of a system that denied voters their choice of government.

In 1990, Haiti held its first free and fair elections. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, then a parish priest, ran for president advocating social justice. His platform included raising the minimum wage, strengthening national industries and taxing the wealthy, who traditionally had escaped this duty. Aristide won more than two-thirds of the Haitian vote, but he was never able to implement his pro-

gram as president. His policies alarmed Haiti's powerful, and he was overthrown in an elite-backed military coup after only seven months in office.

When Aristide was returned to power in 1994, on the heels of a U.S. invasion, his social program was severely curbed. In addition to granting amnesty to Haiti's generals, he agreed to choose a prime minister from the business class. As criteria for his return, and for continuing foreign aid from the United States and other international lenders, he also agreed to a series of economic reforms, including reducing tariffs, civil service downsizing and the privatization of Haiti's state-run industries. The result was not far from the proposals of his U.S.-backed rival for the presidency in 1990, a former World Bank official named Marc Bazin—who received only 14 percent of the Haitian vote. To Haiti's poor majority, these neoliberal economic reforms—part and parcel of the restored government—are viewed as predatory. Peasants call them *peze souse*—literally “squeeze and suck.”

Rising poverty, near total impunity and the three-year governmental impasse have further eroded Haitians' faith in

surprising numbers. Haiti's electoral commission announced in late February that 2.8 million people, nearly two thirds of Haiti's eligible voters, have registered to vote. This probably reflects the fact that the ID cards will also allow them to vote in presidential elections currently scheduled for December—in which Aristide is the front-runner.

According to Pierre Esperance of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights in Port-au-Prince, some are also registering in outrage at the quantity of rightist candidates: The 1987 Haitian Constitution, written after the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship, forbade prominent Duvalierists from holding office for more than 10 years. “But many of these people, responsible for a range of crimes, are now running for office,” Esperance says.

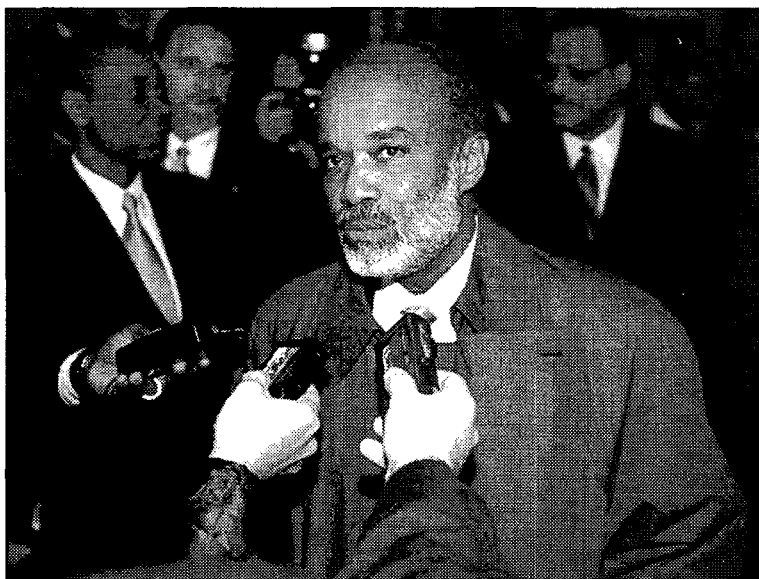
Yet even if the high turnout suggests a renewal of faith in electoral democracy, the numbers also mask how Haiti's poor majority continues to be excluded from the electoral process. There are 3,500 voter registration offices throughout the country. But many offices opened late in the registration process, or not at all. In Port-au-Prince, says IFES' Micheline Begin, “you could see

offices opening for one day, or two days, then closing; or opening for only one or two hours—as a result, in some areas we have only registered 30 percent of the electorate.”

The problem is particularly acute in poorer areas. In Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince's largest slum, only a handful of functioning offices have opened for a population of 200,000. According to Begin, 19 offices were originally established for the area, although Haitian newspapers

reported only seven in operation.

By contrast, in the wealthy and much more sparsely populated suburb of Petionville, there are 23 offices. Almost since the beginning of the process, Haiti's poor have been protesting these inequities. In the capital, demonstrators



Haitian President René García Preval

electoral democracy. Last May, the Haitian Chamber of Commerce held a demonstration for “peace and democracy”—only to be pelted by protesters with plastic bottles filled with urine.

Despite widespread outrage, Haitians have shown up at registration offices in

GEORGE BRIDGES/AFP

Hillary Runs for Cover

When Hillary Rodham Clinton declared her candidacy for the Senate on February 6 in Purchase, New York, she said she wanted New York voters, in particular women voters, to get to know her feminist credentials—to realize that she is something more than the first lady of the president.

Her campaign released a leaflet, "Hillary: The Real Story," that focused on her "pioneering" legal career, her work for children and families, and her role as a young staff member on the Watergate impeachment committee.

But the New York senatorial hopeful has stayed out of perhaps the most critical legal/social issue involving families and human rights in the state.

For weeks, Hillary Clinton's silence about the police killing of Amadou Diallo, the young West African immigrant, was deafening. Except for one uncomfortable brush with reality (when she called the police killing of Diallo "murder," and later apologized) she seemed to have nothing to say.

When four white officers were acquitted on all charges in connection with the fatal shooting in the Bronx, "pioneering" attorney Hillary Clinton was nowhere to be found. Diallo's African mother, her face streaked with tears, walked with her husband from the courtroom; Clinton (who'd earlier offered her condolences to the Diallos from a distance) did not step up to take their hands. "It Takes a Village" Clinton chose not to be part of Al Sharpton's and the Diallo family's efforts to prevent a potentially suicidal expression of community rage in the days that followed.

Instead, when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani lashed out at what he has called "bigots," namely "people who protest against the police," Clinton ran for cover. From a safe distance, she issued a press release, apportioning blame on all sides: "The police must strive for a better understanding of the community they serve, and the community must strive for a better

understanding of the incredible risk the police face in their service on behalf of us all."

In the wake of her "can't we all just get along" response to the verdict, reporters who follow the Clinton campaign implied that she's just in an



awkward spot. Thirty-eight percent of New York voters are upstate; 36 percent are in the five boroughs (the rest are scattered about city's suburbs). If the candidate can't trounce Rudy in the metropolis—the home of half of all registered Democrats—she doesn't stand a chance of victory at the polls. Which is to say, she can't alienate predominantly white, upstate New York.

Maybe Bill Clinton's first lady finds the situation an awkward one, but a credible feminist would hardly be sitting it out. It would not have been a radical move to criticize the mayor's "zero tolerance"

police strategy in New York. Recent critics of city policing include a former police commissioner, a former head of the Police Benevolent Association (the organization that supports officers' families), two former mayors and the state attorney general. It wouldn't exactly be going out on a limb, either, to suggest that the mayor's record on protecting civil liberties is rotten: He has lost every civil rights lawsuit that's been brought against him in the past six years.

Moreover, for someone calling herself a feminist, it would only have been right to stand with those who demand equal protection under the law and safety from abuse.

Mainstream media—notably the *New York Times*—tend to accept that Clinton is the women's candidate. This February, the *Times* ran a story on her standing among women voters and noted that there has been a fall-off in support: "It is not the problem that she or anyone else expected." She went to speak to a bunch of upscale women lawyers in order to "shore up her support." But her reaction to the Diallo situation shows she only cares about some citizens.

Clinton is gambling that minority voters will lean her way regardless. In fact, that's the essence of the "gender gap." (The supposed phenomenon by which women as a group are said to favor Democrats over Republicans.) Since 1994, the majority of white women have voted Republican. It is women of color who push "women" into the Democratic camp.

This February, a Marist College poll showed female voters in New York state evenly split between Giuliani and Clinton, while women of color favored Clinton 79 percent to Giuliani's 11 percent.

Will Clinton suffer for ducking out of the Diallo debate? It's too early to

For someone calling herself a feminist, it would only have been right to stand with those who demand equal justice.

tell. The votes of women of color have always been given, not won, and maybe considering the options, those votes will reluctantly go the Democrats' way again.

But don't give me more guff about Hillary Clinton's "feminist" this and that. When she minced words on New York's experience under Giuliani's police force, Clinton wasn't "stuck" in spot. She staked one out, as someone who runs from trouble instead of running on the principle of justice and fairness. And that's no feminist—that's a conservative Democrat. ■

Justice Denied, Again

The verdict in the Amadou Diallo case is another symptom of the legal system's pandemic racism

By Salim Muwakkil

The four cops who killed Amadou Diallo in a 41-shot barrage did it to cover up a crime he saw them commit. They knew exoneration would follow their concocted tale that they thought he was an armed rapist.

That is the story making the rounds on Chicago's black talk radio. For many callers to WVON-AM, the city's only black-owned talk station, the explanation of corrupt cops killing off a witness is the only one that makes sense. "Why else would all of the cops involved fire their guns so many times?" asked one caller. "Now, none of them can rat on the others."

Such naked distrust of police comes easily to African-Americans in a city still reeling from police killings of two unarmed black motorists in separate incidents last summer. While the names of those slain motorists—LaTanya Haggerty and Robert Russ—trigger anger for black Chicagoans, the name Tyisha Miller, shot 12 times by police while sitting in her car, does the same for black residents of Riverside, California. In Pittsburgh, the iconic name is Jonny Gammage, who was strangled to death by police for driving a nice car through a white suburb. In fact, just about every city in the country can point to one or two freshly killed black corpses as battered symbols of police overkill. The names on this expanding list of victims often are chanted like a mantra when protesters gather to decry the latest outrage. But as the list grows, the chants seem more irrelevant.

In most of these cases the police officers are not even charged with crimes. And when they are, as in Albany, they usually are acquitted. The Diallo case recalls the Rodney King case nearly a decade earlier, when a jury exonerated cops whose guilt also seemed manifest. Both cases involved juries from venues removed from the urban areas in which the offense occurred: the King trial from Los Angeles to Simi Valley, the Diallo trial from the Bronx to Albany. The cops' lawyers sought those venue changes to "whiten" the complexion of the jury pool; since white Americans are less likely to be victimized by overzealous cops, they hold them in higher esteem than black citizens.

And yet, despite the fact that issues of race frame the entire context of these police-citizen encounters, the legal system allows these events to be decontextualized. Codewords



HAYDEN ROGER CELESTIN/UP

A woman dressed in black attends a peaceful rally to protest the acquittal of four New York cops who killed an unarmed immigrant, Amadou Diallo, in a hail of 41 bullets.

are used to camouflage the racist assumptions permeating U.S. law enforcement. The data showing that African-American males comprise about 6 percent of the U.S. population but about 40 percent of U.S. inmates, for example, reveals an astounding disparity that Americans have been socialized to accept apparently as a state of nature. Even as critics draw more attention to law enforcement's core of racist assumptions, supporters of the system more strongly deny the relevance of those biases. Racism has become so stealthy, the black forewoman of the Diallo jury boasted that their decision to exonerate the four cops had "nothing to do with race." Others jurors noted that racial issues weren't even discussed.

But race was at the very core of the case. The Street Crimes Unit, to which the four cops were assigned, operated under the slogan "We own the night," and treated indigenous residents as if they believed it. At the time of Diallo's shooting, African-American officers comprised just 3 percent of the Street Crimes Unit's ranks; Latinos, 16 percent. These low statistics are bad enough for their distorted reflection of the city. But when considering that these mostly white officers are in plain clothes—ostensibly to blend into predominately black and Latino communities, the color-blind charade becomes ridiculous.

Not only are such officers easily identifiable as aliens, but they often carry the heavy weight of racial stereotypes nurtured by an us-versus-them estrangement that is not just geographic and cultural, but racial. Democratic presidential hopeful Bill Bradley had it right when he said the Diallo verdict "shows that racial profiling seeps so deeply in our society that a wallet in the hand of a white man looks like a wallet and the wallet in the hand of a black man looks like a gun."

During the Diallo trial, another tragic example of racial profiling run amuck hammered home Bradley's point. A black plain-clothes police officer in Providence, Rhode Island was shot and killed by two white cops as he rushed to their aid to confront an armed suspect. The victim, Sgt. Cornel Young Jr., was the son of the city's highest-ranking black officer. He was shot three times. "One or both officers has sociological baggage that told him that black men are suspects," says Christopher Cooper of the National Black Police Association, a Washington-based group created to confront racism within police departments. "Had officer Young been a white male who rushed to aid fellow officers, he would not be dead." According to the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, Rhode Island Gov. Lincoln Almond wants the FBI join in the investigation of the fatal shooting.

The FBI also has been called to Los Angeles to begin an investigation into alleged civil-rights abuses by Los Angeles police officers in the department's Rampart Division. The federal agency was called into the investigation by Los Angeles Police Chief Bernard C. Parks, who has made no secret of his belief that the district attorney's weak probe of the scandal was less than conscientious. So far, the corruption investigation has uncovered allegations of unjustified shootings, beatings, evidence planting, false arrests and perjury. Since September, when the scandal broke, at least 21 officers have been suspended, fired or quit. About 70 officers are under investigation in connection with the ongoing probe, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Dozens of criminal convictions have been overturned and hundreds more may yet be thrown out.

Most of this information is coming from a Los Angeles police officer, Rafael Perez, who blew the whistle on the division in return for a lighter sentence for stealing cocaine from LAPD facilities. Perez was part of an anti-gang outfit—the CRASH unit—that is similar to the NYPD unit that "owns the night." These police groups share a culture of racial arrogance.

In Chicago, this arrogance recently hit a new high. One prominent attorney and retired appellate judge, R. Eugene Pincham, is calling for federal assistance in the investigation of a shooting in a police station that defies belief. Chicago police say that Reginald Cole was being interrogated when he suddenly seized the gun of a cop and shot at him. After that, police say, Cole shot himself in the head but continued to threaten the officers until they shot him in the torso. The Cook County medical examiner's office ruled that Cole died of a self-inflicted gun shot in the mouth.

The entire incident is shrouded in typical police mystery. Cole had been transferred to Cook County Jail from Illinois

River Correctional Facility, where he was serving a 10-year sentence for armed robbery. Curiously, Chicago police wanted to question him about a murder that happened while he was incarcerated. Cole's interrogation was unusual for several other reasons: He was questioned without counsel by a lone, armed detective—officers routinely are unarmed when questioning suspects—in a small office rather than in the designated interrogation room, and the prisoner was not restrained. There are no video or audio accounts of the incident, so the department's implausible account is the official one.

"The police department is so contemptuous of the African-American community, they don't even try to create a reasonable story," Pincham says. He says that the police department advanced four different explanations for the killing of Cole. "Each one was a contradiction of the previous one. They just tell us anything and we're expected to accept it like contented slaves. Well, let me say quite emphatically, slavery is over."

It's tempting to dismiss Pincham's defiance as mere bombast, but the former judge is partnered in a trio of black Chicago attorneys (Lewis Myers Jr. and Andre Grant are the other two) widely referred to as the "dream team" for their legal prowess. The team is largely responsible for revealing how the police fraudulently coerced a confession of murder and rape from two prepubescent boys. Chicago cops had first charged and then cleared the two, one 7 and the other 8, for the murder and rape of 11-year-old Ryan Harris.

Pincham believes that the structural racism of American society is the culprit and common link between all of the incidents of police abuse. "The issue of racial profiling is the story of America," he says. It may seem odd that a man who spent decades in the justice system would have such an unrelentingly critical view of that system. Although rare, his critical spirit has inspired many to vigorously question the prerogatives of Illinois justice, and helped fuel the movement that provoked Gov. George Ryan to impose a moratorium on the death penalty.

Similarly conscientious work that forces an examination of the obvious was needed in the Diallo trial. The prosecution was unable to reveal what the cops had to gain from killing the 22-year-old African immigrant. The normalization of racism forced the prosecution to make a case for murder without explicating a motive.

But the motive remains hidden in plain sight. Like a drunk stumbling in a maze of denial, American culture stubbornly resists looking itself in the eye and fessing up to its addiction to racism. Amadou Diallo's color made him guilty until proven innocent. The Street Crimes Unit in New York, the CRASH unit in Los Angeles and all the other urban special forces across the country are imbued with the need to maintain this racial hierarchy. The corrosive notion that the descendants of enslaved Africans remain an inherent threat to the republic drives a criminal justice system that imprisons black men at a rate 12 times higher than that of whites, and summarily executes people like Diallo, Haggerty, Russ, Miller, Gammage ... the mantra continues. ■

Diallo's killers belonged to the NYPD's Street Crimes Unit, which operated under the slogan "We own the night."



The tons of tear gas and pepper spray munitions Seattle police used on demonstrators and bystanders alike at the anti-WTO demonstrations last December contained chemicals implicated in lung problems, eye damage and even death. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the effects of these chemical weapons are not always confined to 15 or so minutes of intense pain and incapacitation. According to manufacturers' documents, military research and medical literature, each of these agents carries short- and long-term health risks; various formulations contain potential carcinogens.

Tear gas and pepper spray cause health problems even when used within guidelines on healthy people. But in Seattle, as elsewhere, law enforcement violated manufacturers' warnings and inevitably sprayed vulnerable populations such as people with diabetes, asthma, allergies or heart problems, as well as pregnant women, children and the elderly. "It was like a war zone," says Russell Sparks, a student from

Bellingham, Washington, who helped block a Seattle intersection on December 1. "The police rolled up in humvees, and I heard the clink, clink of cops jogging toward us. Within seconds the area was filled with gas and the air was pure white all around. I coughed and coughed. I felt like I was on fire, my friend and I both became hysterical. He fell down. A middle-aged man near me passed out, eyes open, shaking, dry heaving, twitching in the shoulders. A woman passed out face down. I tried to help but my eyes were burning and I was screaming for medical help."

Three days later, Sparks still felt "serious flu symptoms, phlegmy, tired, fatigued, problems with eyes focusing, burning, slightly nauseous. I felt like it went into every pore." He wasn't alone. The persistence and severity of symptoms widely reported by demonstrators and hapless bystanders gave rise to speculation that some "mystery gas" had been used. Rumors of nerve gas spread like a toxic cloud across the Internet.

The truth is that tear gas and pepper spray alone can cause temporary blindness, respiratory problems, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue and disorientation. Symptoms may linger for days in otherwise healthy individuals. Out of 187 North Carolina corrections officers exposed to pepper spray under controlled conditions for training purposes, according to Duke University Medical Center study, eight had symptoms persisting for more than a week, including eye problems, chest problems, headaches and disorientation.

More seriously, reports by the Army and in prestigious medical journals have warned of respiratory arrest, pulmonary edema, and acute elevations in blood pressure associated with risk of stroke and heart attack. Military and industrial sources also point to the possibility of cancer, birth defects and DNA damage from these chemical weapons.



MIKE NELSON/AFP

While tear gas and pepper spray are banned from use in war by an international treaty, domestic use is legal and nearly ubiquitous in the United States. The advantages of these "non-lethal" technologies, police say, include fewer deaths and serious injuries to officers and suspects, a more benign image for departments and less litigation. Currently, more than 90 percent of the country's police departments issue pepper spray to their officers, according to the Justice Department, and many departments store tear gas for use in crowd control or riot situations.

Despite widespread use, none of the agents sold for police purposes is monitored, tested or regulated by any government agency for consistency, purity, toxicity or even efficacy. Dr. Howard Hu, a Harvard University epidemiologist, says that the extent of ill effects from these chemicals is unknowable since there have been no rigorous, independent follow-up studies on exposed populations. Little has changed since 1989, when Hu wrote in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "There is an ongoing need for investigation into the full toxicological potential of tear gas chemicals and renewed debate on whether their use can be condoned under any circumstances."

Because they are treated as weapons, police-grade products "fall between regulatory cracks," says Raymond Downs, pro-

gram manager in science and technology at the National Institute for Justice. "Police are at the mercy of manufacturers," Downs adds, in that they have to rely solely on makers' claims for the safety of the chemical weapons themselves and for the wide variety of solvents and propellants routinely added to turn the active ingredients into aerosols.

Those claims may not be all that reliable. In a 1995 report, the Army warned that "manufacturer literature ... is often misleading, incomplete or inaccurate," and in some cases "manufacturers refuse to disclose the components of [their] products." Indeed, Def-Tec, one of the country's largest suppliers, declines to release information on concentration of pepper and tearing chemicals in its dozen products deployed in Seattle. It also won't disclose which solvents or propellants were incorporated, except to refer to three generic product-safety data sheets that the Seattle police are required by law to release.

When it comes to health aspects of any of the chemical weapons, used either singly or in combination, Downs notes, "there is almost no independent research going on." "They all spin the data," adds one federal official. "One manufacturer will say the other's is toxic, but mine is just fine."

Zarc International, which makes only pepper spray products, charges in its literature that the tear gases its competitors make

THE BIG THREE

Each of the three chemical weapons used by the Seattle police—CN and CS tear gases and pepper spray—carries risks. The danger depends not only on how and on whom the weapons are used, but on the particular strength and composition of the weapons. Along with the active ingredient, manufacturers add solvents and propellants to create effective aerosol weapons. Some of the chemicals are known to be hazardous; some are dangerous when used in

combination. Their risks may not be known even to those deploying them.

CN TEAR GAS (-CHLOROACETOPHENONE)

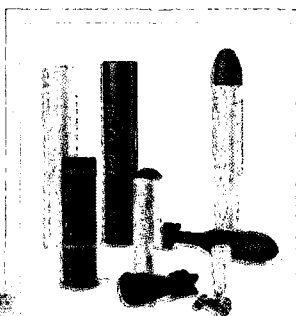
While CN, or mace, is already the most toxic and volatile of the agents, the Def-Tec formula used in Seattle added 50 percent methylene chloride, a toxic solvent used in paint removers. Methylene chloride may be "reasonably expected to be a carcinogen," according to Army

research, while OSHA considers it a "potential occupational carcinogen." The EPA classifies both CN and methylene chloride as hazardous chemicals and requires notifications of release.

CN has been implicated in allergic reactions, permanent eye damage, severe skin burning and even death. According to Harvard epidemiologist Howard Hu, "Little is known regarding its potential for chronic pulmonary or genotoxic effects or for potential effects on reproduction."

Because of its greater toxicity and instability, the Army and NATO have removed CN from their arsenals and replaced it with CS.

Continued on page 16



promote cancer and cause allergic reaction and eye injuries. Def-Tec, a division of Armor Holdings, which manufactures both pepper spray and tear gas, denies any safety problems. "We know of tens of thousands of times that these have been deployed without any incident," says Dave Dubay, director of research for the Casper, Wyoming-based company.

It is not just manufacturers' data that have been called into question, but also the federal government's. After the FBI endorsed pepper spray in 1987 as an "official chemical agent," it was added to the arsenals of most police agencies and largely replaced tear gas. At the FBI, the Johnny Appleseed of pepper spray was special agent Thomas Ward, director of the Quantico Firearms Training Unit and the bureau's chief expert on pepper spray. Ward, who supervised, approved and guaranteed the chemical weapon's quality and safety for the FBI, also wrote the main bureau study cited by law enforcement agencies to defend its use. He promoted pepper spray in a widely disseminated official FBI training infomercial. Then, in February 1996, Ward pled guilty to a felony for accepting a \$57,500 kickback from Luckey Police Products, the country's second largest manufacturer of pepper spray, whose weapons Ward had touted as an FBI trainer as far back as the mid-'80s.

While police rely on manufacturers for safety assurances, the public relies on police to define when use of chemicals weapons is a safe, appropriate response. The International Association of Chiefs of Police issues "use of force" recommen-

TEAR GAS AND PEPPER SPRAY ARE BANNED FROM WARFARE, BUT DOMESTIC POLICE USE IS UBIQUITOUS.

dations for various weapons, but individual departments around the country set their own guidelines and enforce them with varying degrees of rigor.

Seattle police, for example, are authorized to use chemical weapons against people engaged in peaceful civil disobedience. Boston police can only use pepper spray in self-defense against a violent physical assault or when an officer trying to make an arrest is in danger of being injured or losing custody of the suspect. In the case of passive resistance, says Gary Eblan, defensive tactics instructor at the Boston Police Academy, "We would have four officers lift and take the subject to a holding area or wagon."

Washington, D.C. may face crowd control situations similar to those in Seattle when demonstrators descend on the nation's capital in April for meetings of the IMF and World Bank. The Metropolitan Police Department is training 1,400 officers for crowd control and stocking up on chemical weapons and rubber bullets. Planning is underway to coordinate response with several federal agencies, including the FBI, U.S. Park Police, U.S. Capitol Police, Secret Service, U.S. Marshals and Federal Emergency Management Agency. The Metro Police Department refused to release its written guidelines for "use of force."

Police guidelines and manufacturers' standards inevitably vanish in thick air under real life conditions. When deploying chemical weapons on crowds, police have no practical way to monitor those sprayed, to screen out people with risk factors, or to avoid bystanders. Nor can they quickly decontaminate those affected. "Responsible police have a saying: 'When you spray

CS TEAR GAS (O-CHLOROBENZYLIDENE-MALONONITRILE)

Like CN, CS is actually a solid (not a gas) that is mixed with a pyrotechnic base and then exploded or sprayed using a pressurized aerosol. CS raises blood pressure, has caused permanent eye damage when used at close range or at high levels, and in rare instances has led to fatal heart failure and pulmonary edema. In vitro tests have shown it to be clastogenic and mutagenic. The United Nations documented dozens of deaths resulting after the Israeli army used CS in closed spaces against Palestinians.

As with all these chemicals, it puts people with asthma, diabetes and heart conditions at increased risk. "Of particular concern," Hu wrote in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "are allegations that exposure to tear gas has been associated with increases in miscarriages and stillbirths. ... Use in civil unrest demonstrates that exposure to the weapon is difficult to control and indiscriminate and the weapon is often not used correctly."

In 1998, the British medical journal *The Lancet* called for CS spray to be withdrawn from police until more research has been carried out into health implications. Last September, a British government inquiry found that "very little" scientific information and "no comprehensive investigation

of the effects of CS spray in humans was available, nor has there been any systematic follow-up of individuals who have been sprayed."

OC (OLEORESIN CAPSICUM, OR PEPPER SPRAY)

Made from the cayenne pepper plant, OC's reputation as a safe but stunningly painful weapon makes it very popular with police, but may also contribute to abuses. As of February 1998, the International Association of Chiefs of Police had implicated it in 113 in-custody deaths in the United States. Police generally dismiss these figures, arguing that those who died had various complicating factors such as pre-existing health conditions, drug intoxication, or died of positional asphyxia after being left face down with hands cuffed behind their backs.

Harry Salem, a scientist with the Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground who justified CS as "the safest and most potent riot control agent we know," is less sanguine about pepper spray. In unpublished research, he charges that "studies reported on the active ingredient, capsaicin, indicate that it is capable of producing mutagenic and carcinogenic effects, sensitization, cardiovascular and pulmonary toxicity, neurotoxicity, as well as possible fatalities. ... The data on capsaicin indicates that there are risks using this product on a large and varied population."

Amnesty International characterizes use of pepper spray against non-threatening suspects as "tantamount to torture." Britain bans its use. ■

T.J.A.

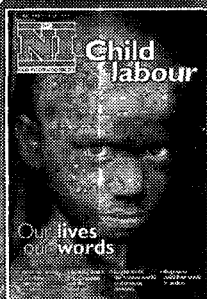
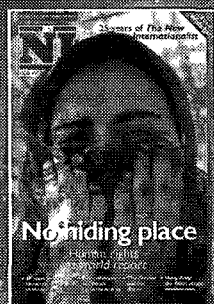


NEW INTERNATIONALIST MAGAZINE *Don't you get it?*



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them, you own them,' " Downs says. "There is a requirement for aftercare. You need to make sure if they need medical attention, they get it. In the military, if a few limp away, we may not care. In the civilian world, aftercare is essential."

Manufacturers also warn against deploying chemical weapons in closed spaces—a warning notoriously violated, with fatal consequences, by U.S. law enforcement in the Waco, Texas siege of the Branch Davidians. The American Civil Liberties Union and other groups have documented numerous instances in which pepper spray was used by police as a form of "street justice" to mete out pain and punish unruly or uppity suspects after they already had been subdued. U.S. prison guards routinely use chemical weapons to perform "cell extractions."

Excessive exposure—both accidental and intentional—is another problem. An internal report by Def-Tec cautions that more than a single, one-second burst of pepper spray "obviously would be an overexposure, which may cause added health risks." And manufacturers recommend that police hold the spray at least several feet from a subject's face to avoid eye damage.

Yet videotape clearly shows instances in Seattle in which police held aerosol cans within inches of the faces of seated protesters and sprayed them repeatedly or in long bursts. "My impression was that most Seattle police officers handled themselves with some restraint, but some didn't," says Larry Gossett, a member of the King County Council. "We got too many reports from people handled in a brutal way for all of them to be false."

An additional risk in situations such as Seattle—where police admitted spraying crowds with multiple chemicals—is that "there has been no research on the synergistic effects," Downs says. Maryland-based Zarc International charges that

"mixing [pepper spray] and other chemical agents such as [tear gas] ... can prove to be harmful or even fatal in real-life situations." The probability of adverse side effects is only exacerbated by the addition of solvents and propellants—some of which are themselves toxic or carcinogenic—to the active ingredients to turn them into effective aerosol weapons.

Despite the dangers and drawbacks of tear gas and pepper spray, most critics are careful to differentiate between one-on-one use by a disciplined, trained officer who is physically threatened and wide dispersal on large and varied crowd of generally peaceful protesters. When judiciously used, chemical agents can immediately incapacitate a belligerent suspect with far less risk of permanent or serious damage than a bullet or a baton blow. "If an officer is faced with a situation in which his life is at stake, it makes sense to respond in a way that will leave both people alive," says Lew Pepper, a physician at the Boston University School of Public Health. "But there is no justification for use of toxic and potentially cancer-causing agents for crowd control for civil disobedience. There are better ways to deal with political speech."

There are also better ways to serve and protect the public than to deploy inadequately tested, unregulated chemical weapons. Unless there is independent research establishing that these weapons are reasonably safe, and until there is credible oversight of police practices and manufacturers' claims, the public has no way to assess how much risk it is accepting in the name of law and order. □

Terry J. Allen can be reached at tallen@igc.org. Support for this article was provided by the Fund for Constitutional Government.

Dialogue: Elián and Cuba

Reviving the Revolution

By Lionel Martin

It is clear from the Cuban vantage point is that whatever the fate of Elián González, the “kidnapping” and brainwashing of this sad-eyed child has backfired on the revolution’s diehard enemies. Polls tell us that the majority of Americans are in favor of Elián’s return. But more than that, the worst nightmare of Cuba’s enemies has come to pass—the snatching of Elián has strengthened the revolution by engendering a militant campaign on this embattled island with massive, wide-spectrum participation in favor of his immediate return.

One of the campaign’s most valuable assets has been the video images, some shown over and over again on Cuban television, of Republican Florida Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen wrapping Elián in the American flag. This affront awakened the historical memory of similar insults to Cubans’ sense of national dignity: U.S. Gen. William Shafter not inviting Cuban Gen. Calixto García to attend the Spanish surrender ceremonies in Santiago de Cuba in 1898; the Platt Amendment of 1901, which proclaimed the right of the United States to intervene militarily in the new republic of Cuba; the two U.S. Navy sailors who, in 1947, defiled the statue in Havana of Cuba’s revered apostle, José Martí; the obsessive hostility of the past 40 years, including an armed invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and the CIA’s repeated attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.

Though the campaign for Elián’s return has been encouraged by Fidel Castro’s government and its mass media, its explosive growth, breadth and fervent nature belie the attempt of some foreign critics to dismiss it as a product of official manipulation and coercion. A conservative estimate is that at least a quarter of Cuba’s population of 11 million has taken part in the marches, demonstrations, forums and meetings. Every day since early December there have been round-table discussions, successions of short speeches at so-called “Open Tribunes,” agitprop performances and musical events devoted to the demand for Elián’s return. Other separate meetings have been held, with Castro quietly in attendance, of primary and secondary school students, research scientists, writers, poets, artists, lawyers, physicians, private and co-op farmers, university students, teachers, journalists, and grandparents. Each night national television devotes at least four or five hours to the Elián story.

The diehard Miami exiles have shot themselves in the foot by giving the revolution’s supporters a unique opportunity to put the Elián story in historical perspective by reviewing Washington’s destructive Cuba policy, the singular treatment afforded Cuban exiles under the Cuban Adjustment Act, and the political corruption of the “Cuban-exile mafia” in Miami.

It also has provided a national forum for surveying the social achievements of the Cuban Revolution—the universal medical and dental care, the growth of an impressive biotechnology sector, low or zero rent for housing, an infant mortality rate among the lowest in the world, free public education on all levels and the increasing role of women in many important spheres of



Cuban life. The fruits of the government’s policy of greater religious tolerance have been in evidence as well. Religious leaders and laymen, especially Protestants, have taken a leading part in the campaign, a fact that facilitated the decision of the U.S. National Council of Churches to sponsor the trip of Elián’s grandmothers to the United States.

For the average Cuban, the weeks of daily discussions have become a political school. In contrast to past battles, the U.S. government has not been the main villain. That role has been assigned to the recalcitrant Miami exiles who are opposed to any dialogue that could lead to a thawing in relations between Washington and Havana. In fact, during the campaign, Castro has expressed his faith in the fair-mindedness of the American people.

Only a decade ago, after the fall of the communist bloc, pundits were predicting the imminent demise of Cuba’s revolutionary government, and the exiles were packing their bags in anticipation of their return. Within Cuba, morale was at a low ebb. I remember one of Cuba’s most famous film directors telling me, his voice full of desperation, “Our dream is shattered. All is lost.”

Ten years later, one can contend that the massive participation in the campaign for the return of Elián points to the continued viability of Cuba’s homegrown radical social experiment. ■

Lionel Martin is an American journalist who has been based in Havana since 1961.

Cubans Divided

By Gabriela del Valle

The Elián González story has shaken both Cuban society and the émigré community in Florida. In biblical fashion, Havana and Miami are passionately fighting over Elián. As in Solomon's trial, one hopes that one of the sides, right or wrong, is willing to give up before the child breaks apart.

The dispute has given a new shot of energy to both societies. Elián's ordeal has offered Cuban-Americans in Florida the perfect opportunity to revitalize their anti-Castro sentiments. The fact that Cubans like Elián's mother are so desperate in Cuba to risk their lives by crossing the strait in precarious contraptions is powerful anti-Castro propaganda. That a child would survive days at sea holding on to an inner tube points to God's intervention. In defending the right of this child to stay in the United States, Cuban-Americans have become more united than they have been in decades. In Elián, Miami has found its cause.

But so has Cuba. The outrage at what amounts to the kidnapping of a Cuban citizen has infused new energy into dormant revolutionary ideals. Historically, nationalism has been the foundation of the Cuban revolutionary tradition, and, in the case of Elián, the Cuban government has been offered a perfect chance to put nationalist sentiments to work. Equally useful has been the display of crass materialism on the part of the Cuban-American community in trying to win the child over. Even for consumer-oriented Americans, the amount of expensive toys Elián has been showered with seems inappropriate. The Cuban government has had a field day denouncing this excess as an example of the deficient moral caliber of the capitalist world.

Can anything positive come out of all of this? Absolutely not. The Elián case has revived the most intolerant positions on both sides of the strait. It has turned the clock back decades by reopening old wounds. Like the child's family, now so bitterly divided that they will no longer speak to or visit each other, Cubans and Cuban-Americans have grown farther apart in the past few months—precisely the opposite of what the times call for.

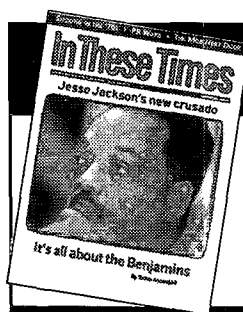
The Cuban Revolution has been one of the most exciting social experiments of the 20th century. Its achievements in the areas of health care, education and racial policy are undeniable. Undeniable too is the fact that today the Cuban government does not meet the needs of its citizens. To argue that the American embargo is the only reason for the island's stagnation is pure self-deception. The revolution's political rhetoric—basically unchanged for the past

40 years, with its inflated slogans about triumphant socialist accomplishments—has become meaningless, even childish. Those Cubans who place themselves within the left tradition and have supported Castro for decades have grown tired of the government's human rights violations, party members' privileges, and the limited opportunities their society offers them. The time has come to move forward, to think of fresh alternatives that will allow the Cuban population to preserve the best of the revolution while incorporating ideas of the democratic world.

It will be up to the Cuban people to chart their future. But it is hard to envision a future that does not include the reconciliation of Cubans living on either side of the strait. Other societies deeply polarized by politics have learned how important it is for different ideological positions to coexist if those societies are to thrive. Spain after Franco is a good example. The success of that country's political transition to democracy in the late '70s was grounded in the shared notion that, after 40 years of hostilities, the future needed to include a reconciliation between old enemies.

The time to revive the Cuban Revolution has long passed. And so has the time for the display of hysterical anti-Castro positions. What is needed is an open political environment in both the United States and Cuba where not only Elián, but all Cubans and Cuban-Americans, are welcome to come and go whenever they please. ■

Gabriela del Valle teaches American history in Chicago.



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Yadda Yadda Yadda

By Caleb Mason

I recently saw an ad for a set of instructional cassettes offering "the wisdom of the intellectual tradition of the West in these easy tapes." "Whether or not you choose to browse among the books discussed," the ad promised, "you'll have your mind opened." Whether or not you ever look at the books?

The ad highlights a deep tension in the relationship between literature and

Seinfeld and Philosophy: A Book about Everything and Nothing

Edited by William Irwin

Open Court

224 pages, \$15.95

popular culture. Big ideas demand a lot in exchange for their mind-opening virtues. But those demands—time, education, discussion, genuine self-criticism—are not always compatible with an economy predicated on universal commodification and the immediate gratification of all consumer desires, including the desire for wisdom.

So wisdom has to start appearing in new places, preferably places that we visit anyway, don't take up too much of our time, and don't demand much energy or effort on our part. At the same time, we need to be reassured that we're not being had, that this is the genuine article, just like whatever's in all those books we're not reading. It is in this spirit that the essay collection *Seinfeld and Philosophy* is offered. Philosophy, we're told, will challenge us to critically examine our lives and values, habits and beliefs; and while this "takes a

certain amount of courage ... the pay-off can be fantastic." Conveniently, however, it will be delivered by a new teaching device that "can educate people even when they are intent on not learning anything," as one of the contributors puts it.

In a nutshell, *Seinfeld and Philosophy* is a collection of very short essays, most of which take the following form: Philosopher X says this; gee, that reminds me of a *Seinfeld* episode. The contributors insist at every turn that in watching *Seinfeld* we'll learn to "look at life in ways different from those to which we're accustomed." But the "big ideas" tossed around are mostly platitudes (George is a loser; we define ourselves through our relationships with our friends; sit-coms let us laugh at ourselves; helping other people is good) and plain silliness (when people say sit-coms aren't philosophically interesting, they really mean that it's impossible to learn anything from fiction or humor), while the show is repeatedly lauded for its "universality"

and depiction of "our" everyday lives. The book is hastily put together, sloppily edited, and alternately smug and self-righteous.

What's interesting about this book is not so much that it's a failure as what it fails to deliver: an introduction to philosophical ideas for those who like, or at any rate watch, sit-coms. What do people hope to get out of books like this one? I imagine that they turn to books like this for much the same reasons they turn to any of the legions of self-help, pop psychology and pop philosophy books also foisted on the public—titles like *The Celestine Prophecy*, *Men Are From Mars*, *Women Are From Venus* or *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. But "wisdom" doesn't keep well in instant powdered form, so these books generally don't give their readers what they want: an opportunity, denied to so many people, to take a real step toward the examined life, to reflect in a critical and theoretical way on the behaviors, values and beliefs they take for granted.

No one is fooled by the transparent palaver that sit-coms are philosophical, or the smug suggestion that we can get our big ideas from TV shows. A



STEVE ANDERSON

large group of people, presumably including those who might buy this book, really don't want to be told, "Oh, go watch TV; it's all in there."

The worst disservice academics can do to those who desire, but have been denied, the luxury of studying philosophy is to try to pass off on them the patronizing fantasy that the passive consumption of TV sit-coms has anything intellectually in common with the active reading of and reflection on the great texts of philosophy or any branch of literature. To do so is to suggest that literature is beyond the reach of almost everyone, which is just patently untrue. Our public universities, gutted and transformed as they are into corporate apprenticeship programs, still stand as proud evidence of that.

There is undeniably a public appetite for moral reflection, self-criticism, logical analysis and the other fruits of philosophy. I know this because I teach in a public university system that offers serious courses in philosophy to a variety of "non-traditional" humanities students: retirees, working adults, kids working two part-time jobs, minorities and immigrants of all hues and origins. These people want to think seriously about their society and their lives, and they want to be taken seriously. They want to read and reflect on Kant, Mill, Marx, Aristotle and Hobbes. I've assigned these philosophers to students with little or no formal background in history or philosophy. It's hard and time-consuming for them, and many contextual details need to be filled in, but they find that they can do it. Readers like these don't need to be coaxed into an interest in philosophy, and they certainly won't be encouraged by the self-satisfied displays of sloppy thinking they'll find in many of these essays.

Readers without formal training may well put down *Seinfeld and Philosophy* inclined to dismiss philosophy as so much self-indulgent stuff and nonsense; an unfortunate outcome for a book that presumably intends the opposite, but one portended by William Irwin's opening essay, arguing that Jerry and Socrates are pursuing the same philosophical project. Irwin's analogies are ludicrous, his evi-

**There is philosophy,
and then there is
the nose-wrinkling
aura of what all
college freshmen
instantly recognize
as bullshit.**

dence is mostly non sequitur or undermines outright his own claims, and his tone is irritatingly pompous: The piece gives off a nose-wrinkling aura of what all college freshmen instantly recognize as bullshit.

The reader who might be enticed into the philosophical life is done a further disservice by the almost complete lack throughout the book of references to any primary or secondary material. A gratuitous slap in the face of readers comes at the end, in a brief section called "Who Are These Philosophers?" Readers will not find out, because instead of biographies or lists of works, we are treated to one catchy quote from each of 48 philosophers, starting with Thales and ending with Harvard's Willard Van Orman Quine.

It's ironic that Irwin ends with Quine, whose most lasting contribution to 20th century philosophy is the rejection of linguistic reductionism; as Quine put it in his 1951 essay "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," "The dogma of reductionism survives in the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or infirmation at all. My countersuggestion ... is that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body." In other words, these quotes are not meaningful, and convey nothing to the reader beyond slogans. The reduction of philosophy to slogans is the worst kind of consumerism of ideas; philosophy becomes a soundbite, a campaign ad, a one-liner to be easily consumed without effort, thought or challenge—in short, a sit-com.

Like those in sit-coms, the book's "insights" are mostly flattering, comfortable and predictable. (Norah Martin's contribution is the lone exception.) Philosophers historically have prided themselves on being social critics, pointing out the failures and contradictions of conventional norms and wisdom, so in a book about the philosophical issues raised by a sit-com, one might expect some discussion of the almost complete racial segregation of primetime TV, which has been much remarked this year. But nearly every essay in *Seinfeld and Philosophy* trumpets the "universality" of the plots, themes and characters on *Seinfeld*, a show on which, as on *Friends*, *Frasier* and a host of others, there are no minorities, no poor people, no homeless, no politics outside celebrity cameos, and no social divisions outside romantic squabbles. Likewise, nowhere in this volume, released into a nation bloated and stupefied with TV and reading less and less with each passing year, is the suggestion even acknowledged that people in search of wisdom might be better off picking up a book than settling down in front of the tube.

Free market mythology may demand that everything—knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, happiness—be on display at a nearby retail outlet, ready to be shipped overnight to your easy chair, but this book is an object lesson in the pitfalls of internalizing the ideology of a myth. Some of the authors do display a little embarrassment about their assignment: Jason Holt warns that "we should be wary of drawing any real conclusions from the plot of a sit-com"; Theodore Schick Jr. notes that "no learning" was a basic rule that shaped the writing of the shows; and Aeon Skoble ends his essay by observing that whatever philosophical insight he's gained, it "was too subtle for the television audience."

After reading these essays, one suspects that essentially the same book could be written about any sit-com. The vision of a shelf full of volumes like *Three's Company and Philosophy* or *Who's the Boss and Philosophy* can be taken, I suppose, either as a validation of this project or as a *reductio ad absurdum*. ■

Caleb Mason teaches literature and philosophy at Columbia University and in the SUNY system.

How the East Was Won

By Jeff Sharlet

Look up "Shane" (as in Alan Ladd) in a Polish literary dictionary, and you'll find the following definition: "a psychologically credible personification of goodness." The movie itself, when it played the Polish provinces, was titled *The Man From Nowhere*. To Polish audiences, that meant more than it would to Americans, who understood Shane's mysterious provenance as a landscape still in formation, the ether of opportunity. For Poles, "nowhere" was home: a country overrun by one aggressor after

Western Amerykanski: Polish Poster Art & the Western

Edited by Kevin Mulroy
Autry Museum of Western
Heritage and the University
of Washington Press
229 pages, \$40

another (though usually Russians) for a few hundred years, a nation that was not really a nation.

Then one day an electrician by the name of Lech Walesa rode into town. A different sort of man from nowhere, but a very recognizable Shane. An ordinary guy, he emerged from the masses to fight for freedom. The liberty he sought was the sort Shane had an eye for: the freedom for folks to settle and get by. The myth of the American Western revolves around the individual, and by the time Walesa made the scene, American Cold Warriors were primed to see him as the second coming of the Lone Ranger. But in truth, Solidarity was never less than a mass movement, and like Shane, Walesa was more a man of the people than any person in particular.

I say "was," because Walesa didn't ride off into the sunset. He stuck around, and his white hat has been getting grimmer with each passing year. It was one thing to fight corrupt communism; it's



1959 poster by Marian Stachurski for *High Noon*.

another to call for the censure of socialism even while you insist on the rights of neofascists such as that latest man in black, Jörg Haider. Then there are the years of anti-Semitic innuendo, the pandering to the lowest (and richest) representatives of capitalism, and his impending defeat in Poland's presidential elections at the hands of a popular, competent, young ex-communist—add it all up and you're looking at a fallen hero, a man whose morality seems fitted to another time.

That's where Gary Cooper comes in. When Poles ran the Soviet-sponsored military dictatorship out of town in the national elections of June 4, 1989, they did so under the gaze of Cooper in his most famous role, that of Sheriff Will Kane in the 1952 film *High*

Noon. For more than three decades, Polish posters for Western films had been one of the country's highest art forms—the result of a tradition of graphic arts combined with a fascination with the mythic themes of the American West and the curious neglect of government censors when it came to movie posters. But the medium arguably reached its apogee on that day, with a poster of Cooper that graced nearly every polling place. He stands with a folded ballot collaged into his hand, against a white background underneath the red banner of Solidarity: high noon for the old regime.

Although this is probably the best-known movie (inspired) poster in Poland, it's also oddly out of synch with the themes that predominate the form, as extensively illustrated in *Western Amerykanski: Polish Poster Art & the Western*, a gorgeous catalog for an exhibit held by the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, edited by the museum's research director, Kevin Mulroy.

A more representative image is Marian Stachurski's poster for *High Noon* when it first played in Poland in 1959.

Against a red background, a nearly abstract image of Cooper stands with empty hands at his side and a dead gunslinger sprawled before him. Cooper's gaze is neither on the enemy nor burning out of the poster; it's cast to the side on a woman in white, an almost anonymous drawing of Grace Kelly, who peers curiously at the corpse. The contour lines of the dead body are the red of the background, the blood that suffuses the scene; Kelly's dress is etched in with care. Cooper's body is the least detailed of all: a few blocks of black and white with gold for a belt buckle, a watch chain, a star. The three figures form a triangle: the viewer's eyes at first jump to Cooper's, then follow his to Kelly's, hers to the dead man, and through the conduit of his collapsed form back to Cooper. Who matters most here? The hero? He wants to know what the lady thinks of what he's done. The

lady, embodiment of civilized society? She wants to know what a dead man looks like. The slain villain? He's dead. But still, he seems to glare up at his killer—once righteous, now implicated in the crime he sought to purge. And on and on in a nervous cycle of guilt and confusion. High noon is past, the town is safe for the womenfolk, but there's still a bloody corpse to account for.

Which brings us back to Walesa and the politics of allegory and art. These days, Walesa no longer looks like a hero; rather, he stands revealed as an uncertain man, committed to a brand of justice that's uncomfortably akin to the wrongdoing it was meant to correct. There's no black and white here, there's only gray, and it's a particularly dirty hue. Likewise, the posters collected in this book offer a vision of the American West and its mythic representation that's hazy rather than well-defined, concerned with complicity as much as with courage. Most are abstract: shapes are more important than lines, the expressiveness of colors stronger than their accuracy. And the meanings of the films, as interpreted by Polish artists, outshine even the star power of Kirk Douglas, Robert Mitchum or John Wayne. In one of the rare posters in which a specific actor is depicted (Cooper withstanding), Jolanta Karczewska's 1965 ad for *North to Alaska*, Wayne is realized via black dots on white, his shoulder, his cheek, his hat disappearing into nothingness.

Many of the posters specifically emphasize the ephemeral nature of heroism. Jacek Neugebauer's 1967 poster for *Major Dundee* shows the hero as hardly more than a smudge of white against a black background, his blue uniform engulfed by the darkness. Waldemar Swierzy's 1978 poster for *The Missouri Breaks* depicts the hero's face overtaken by prairie, grass growing up and through his beard, sprouting

Polish artists cottoned instinctively to the Western, a genre where violence inevitably swallows its purveyors.

from a hat that has lost its form. Jerzy Flisak illustrates *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*, about a fight over a waterhole, with a cowboy whose face, made up of three thick black lines, is almost nothing but water. For a nose our hero has a spigot; but a sighting notch near its mouth clues us into the fact that it's also a gun. "The protagonist ultimately metamorphoses and becomes one with

the object of his obsession," writes Frank Fox, one of four essayists who contribute solid background on the posters to the book. "Yet even in this altered state he cannot transcend violence."

If the classic Western was at least ostensibly about, in frontier historian Richard Slotkin's phrase, "regeneration through violence"—the bad guy gunned down, the cattle rustlers chased off the range, the Indian brutes exterminated—it also revealed that violence inevitably swallows its purveyors, a theme Polish artists cottoned to instinctively. After all, their posters were subversive dissent against a foreign-guided government nonetheless made up of their own. And if Polish movie-goers, accustomed to thinking of their country as the martyr of Europe, reacted to Indian characters with empathy, the posters perhaps spurred them to consider Poland's participation in their own hometown massacre of the Jews as well.

But that's history. When we're watching Westerns we're not thinking of Lucky Lech or the tribes of Israel; we want cowboys!

Or at least, we used to. The Western reigned supreme on Polish screens from 1956—when the Cold War thaw following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin allowed them back in the theaters after a long absence—until a few minutes past the high noon of 1989. Communism collapsed and the latest fairy tales from America rushed into the gap, with American marketing know-how in hot pursuit. No more clunky posters that don't even look real! One world, one poster, *Big Daddy* Adam Sandler pissing on a wall a million times over around the globe: Thus the east was won.

Back when it was still wild though, right was right, wrong was wrong, and men were men. Except, of course, when they weren't, as in Jerzy Treutler's 1972 poster of



Stachurski's 1958 poster for *Annie Get Your Gun*.

AUTRY MUSEUM OF WESTERN HERITAGE

Anthony Quinn metamorphosing into a horse for *Flap*, or Maciej Zbikowski's 1974 image of Cliff Robertson as rearing stallion for *J.W. Coop*. Then there's Brigitte Bardot as the greatest Indian killer of them all, a regular Ms. Death with a Winchester, in Marian Stachurski's eerie 1970 poster for the British Western *Shalako*.

Or better yet, Annie Oakley, in Stachurski's 1958 poster for *Annie Get Your Gun*. Painted in carnival colors, the poster depicts the movie's main characters as icons floating on a field of twilight blue, Annie holding the center with the two Bills, Pawnee and Buffalo, on either side of her; lying on his back



Election Day, June 4, 1989:
High noon for the old communist regime.

this merry-go-round, it should be noted, is distinctly counterclockwise. Plug in Dubya to the left of her, Bad Vlad Putin to the right, Lame Billy Clinton below, and in the Indian's spot, lips kissing a muzzle, take your pick: Chechen, Kosovar, Rwandan, a poor Pole left out of the European Union. It's still the same story.

beneath her, a dandy in pinstripes peeps up her skirt; hovering above her, a smiling Indian grips the barrel of her gun as if it were a peace pipe. The motion of

After so many hard luck years, Polish poster artists understood that's the way myths work—time marches on, backwards as always. ■

The World Is Not Enough

By Carl Bromley

Since the days when blue-blooded women's clubs debated the pros and cons of Fatty Arbuckle's alleged crimes, Hollywood's obituarists have been sounding alarm bells about Tinseltown's legendary excess. Nothing really changes, of course. The casting couch, as well as a multitude of other

er named Giancarlo Parretti mysteriously become chief of MGM and upon arrival tell one of his subalterns, "Laddie, you make-a the pictures, I fuck the girls"? But underlying this excess is an ecology of fear (to borrow Mike Davis' phrase) that has spawned a homegrown tradition of apocalyptic prophecy from F. Scott Fitzgerald and Nathanael West to Kenneth Anger and John Gilmore.

Judging by the cover (and I know we shouldn't) of *Who Killed Hollywood?*, Peter Bart, editor-in-chief of *Variety*, is part of this apocalyptic tradition: He stands poised by a lighting stand, his solemn, bespectacled face staring toward us. The sound stage's emptiness resembles an abandoned factory from the rust belt, gutted by deindustrialization. Bart claims that even though Hollywood is a boomtown—in fact it is one of the few remaining American industries that produces a trade surplus for the United States—there is a discontinuity between Hollywood now and the Hollywood that "existed through the first eight decades of its development." Multinational corporations, in the vast hands of News Corp.'s Rupert Murdoch, Viacom's Sumner Redstone and Universal's Edgar Bronfman, have transformed Hollywood into an imperi-

al tributary that produces "content" for their "global distribution mills."

Corporate leadership per se isn't to blame, Bart cautions, but rather the "sheer weight" of the empires they steward. Corporate committees intervene at every juncture of the movie-making process; as movies become mere merchandise, emissaries from the courts of Pepsi and Burger King start playing a decisive role, advising on casting and story line, selecting movies while they're still in development, to the extent that in the not-too distant future producers might begin to pitch projects directly to the burger people.

This is a welcome, if familiar, critique. But the terms of Bart's analysis are questionable. He is an apologist for the old studio system that kept the talent under lock and key, and where "rough and tumble" immigrants presided "over an old-fashioned, single-product studio with a simple structure." Hollywood's postmodern reinvention irks Bart: the corporate stupidity, the event picture—and particularly the advent of super-agents like Mike Ovitz, whose skill at packaging stars, directors and writers together has removed the "control of the money and machinery

Who Killed Hollywood? ... and Put the Tarnish on Tinseltown

By Peter Bart

Renaissance Books
399 pages, \$24.95

sins, is still with us. Even Hollywood's attempts at temperance—it is the American capital of Nichirin Buddhism, *feng shui* and of course Scientology—seem excessive.

And then there's the money. Executives pay lip service to warnings that the movie business is urgently in need of a "balanced budget amendment," but no one really listens—because belt-tightening, like fly-fastening, isn't what Hollywood is about. Prudence doesn't go down well in a town where the hucksters live by that old Augustinian imperative: "Forgive my sins, but not just yet." Where else could a former Sicilian wait-

away from the producers." Producers no longer have the latitude to "establish a wide-ranging body of work that reflects quality and integrity." Nor are they close to achieving the "mythical status" of a Goldwyn or Selznick. The new math means that top stars and star directors are "becoming vastly more wealthy than the studio executives."

One can only weep with him so long for this older form of exploitation, especially when he describes the good old days when talent was protected by a phalanx of security men who were "astonishingly efficient at suppressing news of peccadilloes"—Errol Flynn could fuck an underage girl for two days with the studio's ring of protection.

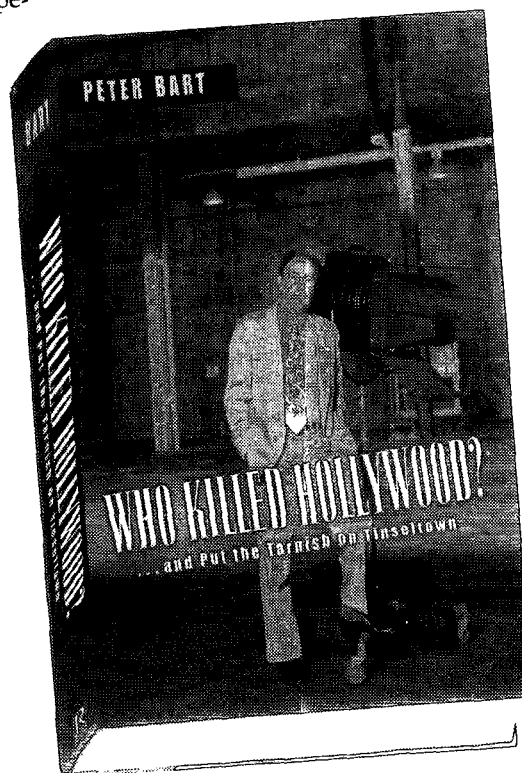
This brings out the worst of Bart, and his writing becomes saturated by cliché. Writers "whine" and actors are "dumb" (when they're not being overpaid); then of course there are the bloody unions demanding too much money. Bart complains: "A movie set is one of the few places in the world where blue-collar laborers who hand cable or move props make well over \$100,000 a year and talk about their investment properties and their condos in Hawaii."

One person emerges with fragrance from these proceedings, and that's Peter Bart. Though Hollywood is fueled by "narcissistic and primal appetites," Bart's cherry remained intact during his 18 years as a movie executive, despite "tactful approaches made" and the three women who sent him packages of bikini underwear. And like the producer who picks up an Oscar for a picture whose genius resides with the writer and director, Bart never tires of reminding us that he was the ballsy young executive who pitched *Harold and Maude* to his incredulous superiors. (He doesn't mention that he was also behind *Revenge of the Nerds II*.)

But what really undermines the book's promise is that it's cut and pasted from his old columns in *Variety* and *GQ*. Bart seems uninterested in doing the hard work, in turning his interesting premise into, well, a book. Instead we get a sloppy first draft, a smorgasbord of snide and sycophantic industry memos that are O.K. to read over breakfast but do not

merit inclusion in a collection. An interminable feeling of déjà vu and ennui beleaguers the reader, who asks, "Where did I hear this story first?" and then realizes he read it 40 pages earlier.

The joke's on Bart, who moans about the scale of repetition and recycling in Hollywood. The result is that the quality items in the book—such as Bart's demolition of the MPAA's rating sys-



A self-styled prophet of doom.

tem—get lost in the mix. And when Bart disparages Peter Biskind's superior *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* for missing the "joy" of the New Hollywood of the '70s, one yearns for the verve of Biskind's book or even the grace of critic David Thomson's prose.

Despite its glitz and glamour, Hollywood is subject to the same mundane capitalist pressures that other industries experience, only more intensely. None of the studios, despite seasonal attempts at frugality, dare challenge the star salary system; yet price inflation and profit-squeezing mean that Hollywood has to be globally hegemonic unlike any other national film industry. As William Goldman said in a sentence that encapsulates the traumatized

Hollywood exec's psyche to a tee, "Nobody knows anything."

That's why the entertainment industry has assiduously lobbied, in tandem with MPAA president and CEO Jack Valenti's Nostradamian ravings, for the creation of an international trading and intellectual property rights regime that makes the world a safe place for its product. The new global Hollywood is both handmaiden and creature of this neoliberal arrangement. Bart acknowledges a number of times that today's entertainment conglomerates are "more akin to nation states." In some respects they are more powerful, certainly when it comes to the allegiance to their images, but they are also weaker, hence Hollywood's need for Washington when the going gets tough in the international marketplace.

The Hollywood apocalypse, however, falls on some shoulders more heavily than others. Perhaps you haven't heard, but jobs have been hemorrhaging from Tinseltown. Not Tom Cruise's or Sly Stallone's, but those of the working stiffs Bart scorns as feather-bedded and living above their station. Wages are lower than a decade ago; union members are having to swallow their pride and supplement their income on non-union productions. Reports from the Hollywood guilds claim that nearly 25 percent of production has run away to Canada over the past year, particularly to British Columbia. (The so-called socialists who rule British Columbia claim this job-stealing as a policy "bright spot." So much for solidarity.) Thus lured by a low Canadian dollar and tax incentives, the physical Hollywood is beginning to resemble a rustbelt—while for the new virtual Hollywood, the world is not enough.

Bart's book misses this crucial political dimension. He can't conceive that the golden age he yearns to exhume was more a product of the wider radical and intellectual ferment than just the enlightened despotism of studio heads. The cultural fronts of the '30s and '40s, the war against fascism, the insurrectionary days of the '60s that so indelibly marked the New Hollywood of the '70s: That is what we should be exhuming. ■

Carl Bromley also writes about politics and cinema for *The Nation* and *Cineaste*. He is editing a forthcoming anthology of *The Nation's* film writing.

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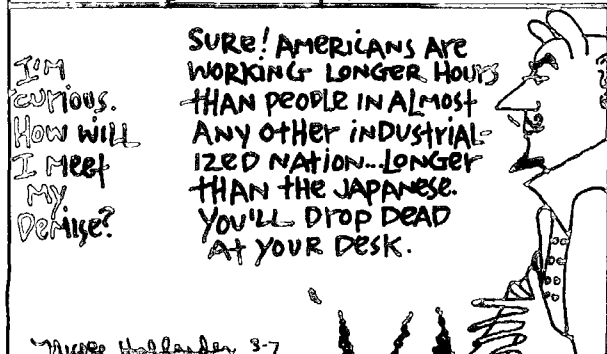
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By Nicole Hollander

Continued from page 30

All of which is a prerequisite for any long-term optimism about intellectual life. The zine scene has the potential to revive the public sphere: the cultural space where conversation (about everything) is open (to everybody). That's the good news. The bad news is that you have to read a lot of zines before encountering anything that resembles an idea. The format can be as formulaic as a sit-com. There are the inevitable (and interminable) free-form Q&A sessions with bands—

Interviewer: So, uh, do you guys like ... stuff?

Bass Player: Cough medicine rules, man!

—and the personal essays, which indirectly document that many people admire Charles Bukowski (all the way to the bottom of the bottle). And I don't even want to talk about the poetry.

Nobody said cultural democracy would be pretty. Besides, the zinester's low-budget valorization of pure and uncompromised "self-expression" (however brain-dead) actually has a pretty glorious history behind it. The line of inheritance runs from William Blake and Walt Whitman (each of them practicing DIYers) through the Beats and Cleveland's New Left poet laureate d.a. levy, right on down to the bohos at Kinko's.

But very seldom will you find a zine in which the writers are thinking (rather than grouching) about the world—much less, performing the intellectual's very distinctive and peculiar function, which is thinking-about-how-to-think-about-the-world. A remarkable exception is *Hermenaut*. This irregular journal of cultural analysis, now in its eighth year of publication, started out in the standard format of a pamphlet assembled at a copy shop. Issues contain a mixture of critical pieces (long and short) on movies, music, television, literature, philosophy and everyday life in the shopping mall of overdeveloped capitalism. The founding editor, Joshua Glenn, contributes a running series of critical essays on cultural heroes, including Simone Weil and Bruce Lee.

Recent issues have had the book-like design of a scholarly journal—though footnotes are prohibited, and academic jargon handled with the ironic playfulness of recovering graduate students who can't quite believe they ever used to talk like that. A recently launched Web site (www.hermenaut.com) conveys something of the rough-and-ready quality of its zine origins—particularly in a section called "The Wicked Pavilion," where readers are invited to join ongoing dialogues about recent films, Hannah Arendt's philosophy and "Archetypal Roles in *Beverly Hills 90210*"

Now, the media have forged several new generational identities for people in their twenties since the heyday of "Generation X" (roughly, the first Clinton administration). So

there is already something a little quaint about *Hermenaut's* lingering embrace of the slacker ethos, which boils down to: Think hard; sleep late; peer into the abyss of self-creation when the boss isn't looking. But after you read a few issues, it becomes clear that the magazine is also trying to transcend that attitude. The contributors are trying to think about (and against) the several varieties of coolness, apathy, "irony" and psychic reserve that have become part of the way we live now.

This requires more than overeducated riffs on pop culture. At first glance, *Hermenaut's* take on the contemporary cultural climate looks very similar to that of *The Baffler*—which has, over the past decade, elaborated a definitive contribution to the critique of the political economy of hip.

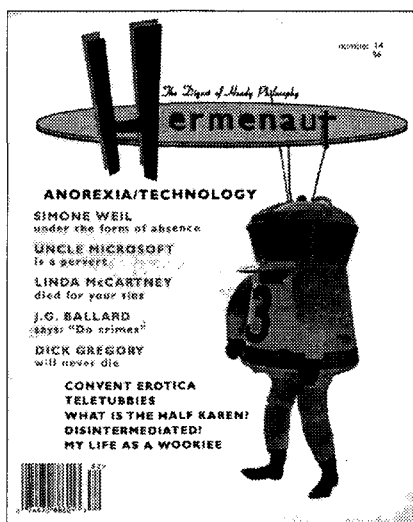
In brief: Not only will late capitalism willingly put up with a certain amount of rebellion, it'll even sell you the outfit and accessories. Bohemia is the vanguard of marketing. The media are ready and willing to disembowel themselves through ever more involuted gestures of self-contempt—if only you'll keep watching. Resistance to the society of the spectacle becomes just another spectacle.

Those ideas resonate in *Hermenaut* in part because they are true—and in part because of an overlap in writers with *The Baffler* (some of whom also contribute to the online magazine *Feed* and to *In These Times*). Their shared perspective raises a tough question: What is to be done? Recent issues of *The Baffler* have marked a turn to the international labor movement as the one form of resistance that doesn't lend itself to instant recuperation by consumer society.

In *Hermenaut*, the analysis heads in a different direction. Not toward struggle over work and wages—but into the paradoxes generated by trying to create a meaningful life when all the identities available are pre-processed and market-segmented. "We prefer to concentrate our attention on the independent use of mass culture products," as a *Hermenaut* editorial puts it, "a use which, like the ruses of camouflaged fish and insects, may not 'overthrow the system,' but which keeps us intact and autonomous within that system, which may be the best for which we can hope."

Of course, there is a very fine line between contemplating the world and merely adapting to it. That conundrum is not entirely lost on *Hermenaut*—which will

devote its next issue, due out this summer, to the cultural implications of the "Stockholm syndrome" (the phenomenon in which people who are held prisoner come to identify with their captors). When changing the world seems impossible, even interpreting it anew becomes a small insurrection against the order of things. ■



The contributors are trying to think about (and against) the several varieties of coolness, apathy, "irony" and psychic reserve that have become part of the way we live now.



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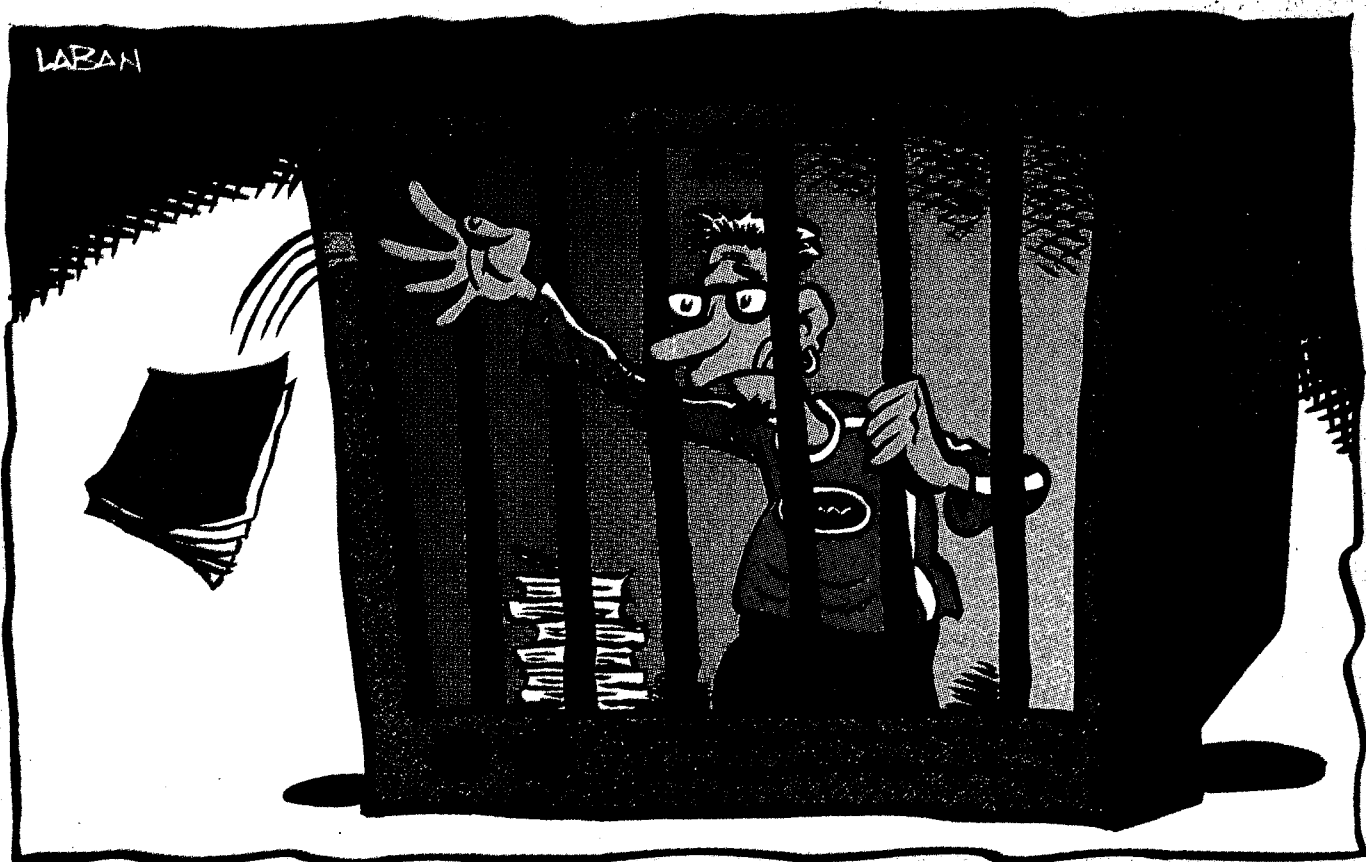
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Depth Takes a Holiday

By Scott McLemee

My modest proposal last fall to euthanize "public intellectuals" has yielded a small but encouraging response from readers (see "Wills Power," Nov. 14). When Russell Jacoby coined the term more than a dozen years ago, it carried the considerable force of a tough-minded cultural manifesto: His book *The Last Intellectuals* was a polemic directed against those leftists of the '60s who had succumbed to the jargon (and other comforts) of academia. Critical thought was becoming professionalized. Jacoby challenged intellectuals to commit themselves "not simply to a professional or private domain but to a public world—and a public language, the vernacular."

So far, so good. But something went wrong. By the mid-'90s, the phrase "public intellectual" had itself become part of the vernacular. It was used by people acquainted with Jacoby's work only by reputation—if that well. The "culture wars" created a steady demand for commentators to appear on television and in newspapers. A university in Florida even offered a Ph.D. in public intellectualism. What started out as a critical concept has ended up as a job description.

The problem may lie in that innocuous little word "public." It has a complex history of implications. At its core is the notion of a space open to everyone—and owned by no single person or group. (A relevant example would be the public library). But today, "public" largely means "produced

by or pertaining to mass media." That is the overtone of most current usage. "Public affairs" is a kind of broadcasting. "Public opinion" is what the Republicrat Party seeks to influence through carefully designed television ads. And "public dialogue" can be found in the fine products of the Time-Warner corporation.

If so, the role of "public intellectuals" is clear. They are not thinkers who defy narrow specialization, but agents of the media market: translators of concept and context into hot-topic soundbites. The ultimate embodiment of this is the work of Michael Eric Dyson—the African-American cultural critic who celebrates Martin Luther King by comparing him to thug-rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg. Ideas count less than familiarity with the tactics of staged outrageousness.

In that case, "public intellectuals" enhance the life of the mind in America about as much as infomercials do. But it might be that non-academic thought and commentary are alive and well—thriving on the margins of the culture industry. Self-published magazines spring up constantly, mushroom-like, on the Web and on newsstands. They are labors of love: nearly all lose money (in part, because many major distributors never get around to paying). The do-it-yourself ethos stimulates dialogue and initiative. If you don't like what other people are doing, start your own damn magazine.

Continued on page 28

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